

“ I’m not sure when I started getting Bookshare books, but it’s been a love affair the whole way. ”

— KATHERINE SCHNEIDER



CHALLENGE

Katherine Schneider, Ph.D., is a retired clinical psychologist from the University of Wisconsin and author who lives in Eau Claire with her ninth Seeing Eye dog, Luna. Blind since birth, she grew up in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in the 1950s, and received braille and talking books from the National Library Service. Her mother spent endless hours reading aloud to her, but there weren’t enough books available in alternative formats to keep her satisfied. Aside from Louis Braille and Helen Keller, the books rarely featured characters who were blind or had disabilities. Katherine experienced firsthand the frustration of growing up in an environment of book scarcity and what it’s like to live in a bubble of isolation due to her disability.

SOLUTION

Katherine can’t recall exactly when she discovered Bookshare, but it’s been a love affair the whole way. Bookshare, a Benetech initiative, is the world’s largest library of accessible ebooks. She reads in a variety of ways: she downloads audiobook files from Bookshare and the National Library Service, uses hardcopy braille, and also uses a refreshable braille device. Growing up with a shortage of books she could read on her own, she doesn’t care how the narration sounds (human or digital) as long as she can understand it.

IMPACT

With help from Bookshare, Katherine received her bachelor’s degree from Michigan State University and a doctorate in clinical psychology from Purdue University. “Reading to keep current in my field and to see what was available in books about disability issues has been extremely helpful,” says Katherine. “Then there’s the joy of getting a new thriller in Bookshare the day it’s published, often ahead of my sighted friends.” To address the lack of characters with disabilities in literature, Katherine established the Schneider Family Book Award in 2004 to encourage authors and publishers to offer more books that embody the disability experience for children and adolescents. Her efforts have paid off, and Bookshare is proud to offer the full collection of award winners and honors books. Katherine continues to be an advocate for the blind community and encourages everyone to build a good support network, expect to give 110%, and enjoy the journey toward your goals.

Benetech is a nonprofit that empowers communities through software for social good. Our work transforms how people with disabilities read and learn, makes it safer for human rights defenders to pursue truth and justice, and connects people to the services they need to live and prosper. We’re constantly pursuing the next big social impact.